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## **U.S. Strategic Posture Commission Ratchets Up Nuclear Arms Race**

*Santa Fe, NM* – Today, *America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report* was released by the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. In its own words:

“The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States was established by the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), and concludes that America’s defense strategy and strategic posture must change in order to properly defend its vital interests and improve strategic stability with China and Russia. Decisions need to be made now in order for the nation to be prepared to address the threats from these two nuclear-armed adversaries arising during the 2027-2035 timeframe. Moreover, these threats are such that the United States and its Allies and partners must be ready to deter and defeat both adversaries simultaneously.”

The United States has already embarked upon a \$2 trillion “modernization” program that is a complete makeover of its nuclear forces. This program will rebuild every warhead in the planned future stockpile while giving them new military capabilities. It will also build new-design nuclear weapons and new missiles, subs and bombers to deliver them, plus new nuclear weapons production plants expected to be operational until the 2080’s.

New-design nuclear weapons could actually harm national security, as they cannot be full scale tested because of the existing global testing moratorium, thereby perhaps lowering confidence in stockpile reliability. Or arguably worse yet, they could induce to U.S. to resume full scale testing, after which other countries would surely follow.

But the greatest danger is the ratcheting up of a second nuclear arms race. This new arms race is arguably even more dangerous than the first because of multiple nuclear actors, new cyber threats, hypersonic weapons and artificial intelligence. To help give this needed context, Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary during the Cuban Missile Crisis, said humanity survived the first arms race only by luck. Ronald Reagan declared that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought.

Nuclear weapons are immoral, as Pope Francis and Santa Fe Archbishop John Wester have been clear about. They are genocidal weapons that would kill noncombatants, women and children, the aged and the newborn, genetically harm future generations and starve billions with nuclear winter. In short, possession by any country of nuclear weapons is a threat to all.

But how to get rid of them? There are no easy answers. However, the United States must show leadership toward that end, by beginning to honor the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty’s

mandate to enter into serious negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament, which must be universal and verifiable. Nuclear disarmament is, after all, the official policy of the U.S. government. But lip service must end, and actual global leadership begin toward eradicating the one class of weapons that can destroy all of civilization.

But sadly, any future arms control takes a subservient position in the Commission's report. It states:

“The Commission recommends that a strategy to address the two-nuclear-peer threat environment be a prerequisite for developing U.S. nuclear arms control limits for the 2027-2035 timeframe. The Commission recommends that once a strategy and its related force requirements are established, the U.S. government determine whether and how nuclear arms control limits continue to enhance U.S. security.”

The last remaining arms control treaty, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty between the U.S. and Russia, limits deployed strategic warheads to 1,550 each. But that treaty is near dead given the war in Ukraine and Putin's nuclear saber rattling and is very unlikely to be renewed. China is expanding its arsenal from its previous modest level of around 350 warheads, with ~600 new intercontinental ballistic missile silos in its western desert.

In response, the Commission's report states:

“... these threats are such that the United States and its Allies and partners must be ready to deter and defeat both adversaries simultaneously... we find that the United States lacks a comprehensive strategy to address the looming two-nuclear-peer threat environment and lacks the force structure such a strategy will require... we make clear that the fundamentals of America's deterrence strategy remain sound, but the application of that strategy must change to address the 2027-2035 threat environment. Those changes drive necessary adjustments to the posture of U.S. nuclear capabilities – in size and/or composition.”

However, neither the U.S. nor Russia have ever had just “deterrence.” Instead they have always had a hybrid of deterrence and nuclear warfighting capabilities. That is why both countries have thousands of nuclear weapons instead of just the few hundred needed for deterrence, plus huge so-called modernization programs. The Strategic Posture Commission refrains from recommending a specific number of needed future nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, its call to simultaneously “deter” China is a prescription to radically increase, perhaps even double, the number of deployed nuclear weapons. This is, of course, grimly ironic when there is already global overkill many times over.

The Commission's specific recommendations are a throwback to the first nuclear arms race. They include deploying multiple warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles (which increases strategic instability), possibly deploying road mobile ICBMs, putting strategic bombers back on continuous alert status, adding more heavy bombers and strategic submarines, and increased emphasis on tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons.

To achieve all this, the Commission recommends that “DOE/NNSA plan to increase production capacity beyond current POR [program of record].” The National Nuclear Security Administration’s current plan is to produce at least 30 plutonium pits per year at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and at least 50 pits per year at the Savannah River Site (SRS). In alignment with that, the Commission recommends the replacement of LANL’s pit production facility known as PF-4. That would be a huge shift from the current program of record of ~\$5 billion in upgrades to the facility over the next 5 years. It would be a huge and controversial expense, when at the same time both LANL and SRS are experiencing serious cost increases and schedule delays.

The last three Review Conferences of the NonProliferation Treaty, which occur every five years, have ended in total failure, making zero progress toward nuclear disarmament. In this vacuum, the Second Meeting of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is slated to begin at the United Nations in New York City this November 27. More than 120 countries have signed the ban treaty while 68 and counting have ratified it.

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch New Mexico Director, commented, “The release of *America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report* will be further evidence to the majority of the world’s countries that the nuclear weapons powers will never abide by the NonProliferation Treaty’s mandate for nuclear disarmament. I expect to soon see an increasing demand by the non-weapons states at the United Nations for universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament.”

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*America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report*, is available at <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>

Recommended analyses of the *America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report* by the Federation of American Scientists and the Arms Control Association are available at <https://fas.org/publication/strategic-posture-commission-report-calls-for-broad-nuclear-buildup/> and <https://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/2023-10/aca-warns-against-calls-buildup-us-nuclear-arsenal-russia-china>

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